OH, Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? It's a very easy one to answer, and Kyrle Bellew, as he puts the question nightly to Mrs. Potter, at Daly's Theatre, knows that full well. If he vouchsafed an accurately truthful response, he would say to the lovely girl on the balcony, "You know well enough why I'm Romeo. I'm Romeo, because you insist on being Juliet, just as I was Marat when you wanted to impersonate Charlotte Corday, and Cardinal de Rohan, when you persuaded yourself that you could play Marie Antoinette. I've been the Jack to your Jill for a good many years, and now you calmly turn ... and ask me wherefore I'm Romeo."

This repartee, however, is not in the Furness Variorum edition, which, Mr. Daly insists, is the basis of the acting arrangement of "Romeo and Juliet," as presented here.

Mrs. Potter's ambition is boundless as the ocean, and she keeps her Kyrley chained down to it. She gives him just so much rope—enough to hang himself with, as a rule—and he does what he can with it. He generally hangs himself, though he failed to commit suicide in "Charlotte Corday." As Romeo, however, he is again in the sweet, tepid subjection at which so many actors would rebel. Kyrle Bellew is a remarkable man. He has talent, beauty, and an intensely artistic temperament, all of which he has sacrificed on the shrine of the lovely but insatiable Cora Urquhart Potter, the modern "tragedy queen," who believes that she is a Mrs. Siddons.

Mrs. Potter's latest idea is to give us a Juliet with Worth, Leferrier and Pingat "fixings," a clothes-wearing Juliet, a sartorial Veronese virgin. When ever this modern Juliet is in doubt she changes her clothes. She rushes on in pink at Lady Capulet's reception, and when Friar Lawrence gives her the phial which is destined to fade the roses on her cheeks to "paly ashes," she is in his cell, clad in grass-green satin. She is a vision of loveliness, and she knows it. The Mary Annes and the Sarah Janes of New York's to-day clamor for the fashion plates, and Mrs. Potter was determined that her Juliet should not fall for lack of clothes.

In fact it would not have been at all surprising if Romeo had altered his famous balcony speech so that it read:

See how she leans upon her hand!
Oh, that I were a glove upon that hand (a jouvin with twenty-six buttons),
That I might touch that cheek.

Of course, this craze for decoration is barbaric, and I am astonished that Mrs. Potter should have succumbed to it so thoroughly. The ancient Britons used to stain their bodies blue with a juice called wead, and we read of it smilingly. All the Worth gewgaws affected by Mrs. Potter are merely an improved condition of wead, and they are just as peacocky and undignified, Juliet does not need the milliner's art, and it is impertinent to deck her out like a popinjay. If Mrs. Potter insists upon so many clothes there are a dozen playwrights who lend themselves artistically to the dressmaker's art far better than does Shakespeare.

In fact I can tell you something that may make you blush. When Miss Olga Nethersole—another clothes-crazy woman—was preparing her version of "Romeo and Juliet" she thought up an adorable costume to wear on Juliet's wedding night. It was a dream. Miss Nethersole, however, felt a little shaky as to its historical accuracy, so she wrote to a British Museum gentleman in London asking him to sketch for her the costume in which Juliet would probably have appeared on that most auspicious occasion. The reply came in due course, and Olga tore open the envelope with tremblingly anxious hands. Out fell a crude drawing of a lady in her "birthday dress." Miss Nethersole almost fainted, and Brother Nethersole was obliged to read to her the legend inscribed beneath. "If you wish to be historically accurate," it read, "you must appear as a Living Picture. As you will probably object to this, wear anything that is simple and unassuming."

While I would not ask Mrs. Potter to appear on the stage of Daly's Theatre in the garb that poor old Nature sketched for her, I will insist that she has no right to give us a Juliet who is a slave to her clothes. She is such a richly beautiful woman that she does not need such highly-colored decoration. It is, in fact, irreverent and pinchbeck. I have never seen a more sublimely ideal-looking Juliet than Cora Urquhart Potter. Her exquisite face is something to rave about; her undyed hair is a subject for a poem, and her marvellously lean and tragically abdominal form is a luxury to gaze upon.

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The only feature, however, that Mrs. Potter has in common with Duse and Bernhardt is the abdomen. It is really odd how completely the glories of tragedy have shifted from the breast to the abdomen. Years ago our tragediennes were superb with salient breast and limbs that were straight and puissant. Sarah set the abdominal fashion, and made stomachic development a feature of tragedy. All her gowns are designed with this feature in view. Corsets she has always rigorously eschewed. Narcissus rather than Venus has been the form upon which she modelled herself. With Eleanora Duse it is just the same. Her emotion is nearly all expressed abdominally, although she is not as severely opposed to lacing as is Sarah.

Mrs. Potter has imitated the abdominal mania of these two actresses, and it is all that she has been able to successfully imitate. Her Juliet is a strikingly amateurish piece of work. The sing-song delivery, that is absolutely inexpressive of any but the most mechanical sort of emotion, is never dropped. She tries very hard. It is impossible not to feel keen admiration for the determination of this plucky woman. The strings move, and the marionette dances, however, and that is all you are called upon to realize. In the potion scene Mrs. Potter was deplorably stagey. Not a thrill did she give you.

Her horror at the idea of the tomb, "where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth, lies festering in his shroud," was forced and supremely ladylike. You felt that she wanted to say, "Ugh! How nasty!" and to draw up her skirts in civilized repugnance. It had all been taught to her, and she spoke her lines as though she were uttering a recitation in a private drawing room. It is absurd to indulge in the luxury of Juliet with such very obvious limitations. I wish I could say that fools rush in where angels fear to tread. I can't, though, for it would not be true. Nobody fears to tread on Juliet's preserves. Never has a character been so hopelessly besieged by the most incompetent sort of women. The dream of the amateur is Juliet. The hope of the dramatic school student is Juliet. The society actress longs for Juliet. The commedienne feels that she can never be thoroughly happy until she has tried Juliet. It is astounding. The role is such an overwhelmingly difficult one that the most accomplished actress need not feel discouraged if she fail in it.

Mrs. Potter has made the effort in good faith, and if I criticise her rather harshly, it is not done in flippant disregard of her sincerity. She can feel proud of her failure, for more experienced actresses than Cora Urquhart Potter have not hesitated to acknowledge their shortcomings in this role. The only anger that Mrs. Potter's work can possibly cause is aroused by her ill-advised sartorial display—a display that should be relegated to cheap actresses of the Mrs. Langtry persuasion. Physically, Mrs. Potter was Juliet. In the first act she did not look a day over sixteen. Such overweening youth is really incredible. As a rule the actresses who can act Juliet are fat as Bridget Mahoneys. The ability to understand the passion of the Veronese heroine rarely comes to a woman until she is forty, and it is hard to accept a forty-year older for this fourteen-year girl. Mrs. Potter as Juliet would fire the blood of any Romeo, modern or ancient. Personal beauty is an exquisite gift, and such loveliness as that possessed by Mrs. Potter is rare. She has a face that the gods might covet. It is not only dainty, but it is intellectual.

Still, you felt glad that she died in the fifth act. She would have made her Romeo a very bad wife. She would have tired of him in a few months. She was just the sort of girl, as Mrs. Potter played her, to figure in some post-marriage scandal, and possibly in the divorce courts. She was not the sort of maiden to be permitted to tie herself for life to a man with whom she had fallen in love at first sight in a ballroom. She would have been disgusted at the advent of little Romeos, and would never have submitted to a docile, boiled-mutton existence, bounded on the north by the cook, and on the south by a perambulator.

Kyrle Bellew, as I remarked before, subordinated himself to Mrs. Potter. He was a placid but not unmusical Romeo. He strutted too much, and, like Mrs. Potter, he suffered from clothes. That red suit was in bad taste, for it wearied the eye and distracted the attention from the play. Of course, love-sick gentlemen cannot be expected to "dress accordingly." It would be ridiculous to match sentiment and clothes. Still, a lover pining away for his fair lady might reasonably be asked to avoid sartorial fireworks.

The other members of the cast were not good, with the exception of Mrs. W. G. Jones, who was on the stage long before most of my readers were born. She spoke her lines as though she understood them. She mouthed not, neither did she approach her utterances in fear and trembling. Verner Clarges made a good Capulet, but I did not like the Mercutio of William Redmund. I've never before seen Mercutio played as Mr. Redmund played it, and though I'm no slave to tradition, still, such a very modern Mercutio was rather irritating. He might have been a Yale student out on an Italian holiday. The Friar Lawrence of Frank Currier was equally unsatisfactory.

Sumptuously is this production of "Romeo and Juliet" mounted. Who is there that can order such gorgeous stage pictures as Augustin Daly? Irving, himself, could not have provided a better setting. The garden scene won my heart. It was such a darkly mystic and delightfully uncultivated garden. It was not one of your Euclid-ly precise pleasure grounds, but a veritable Italian jungle, out of the gloom of which peered fair Juliet's balcony. That garden scene is a masterpiece. No stage has ever seen anything so superbly subdued and fascinating. There was no glare; no cheap moonliness; no new-fangled lights and shades. There are times when Augustin Daly's productions arouse in you such a feeling of admiration that you long to rush up to him and tap him—well, on his sacred Hat. You can see the very poetry of an early garden at Daly's Theatre. No Romeo and Juliet ever cooed in a more artistic coo-ing ground.

Let us hope that a good deal of the annoying music that marred the first performance of this "Romeo and Juliet" will be cut out before the production is much older. It was a most impertinent interruption. It was turned on at the most irrelevant moments, and it was death to all illusion.

* * *

Oh, that I could see Eleanora Duse as Juliet! Take my pocketbook, take my watch, take my boots, take anything you want, but let me see Eleanora Duse as Juliet before I die. I can't put it in a more pathetic way, can I? There are tears in my demand. Duse as Juliet! Can anybody imagine anything more perfect?

You see, I'm veering round to Duse again. I've had her in my mind all the time I was writing the above, but I felt that I must restrain myself. It is horrid to be accused of exuberant enthusiasm, but it is impossible to approach the Duse subject in cold, critical blood.

The Italian actress gave us a new impersonation at the Fifth Avenue Theatre last Monday night—that of Magda in Hermann Sudermann's four-act drama, "Casa Paterna." It was the best Magda that we have had, and I sincerely trust that it will be the last. Magda is not a role for any great actress, and the more you see of it, the more convinced you are that Hermann Sudermann is for the library table rather than the footlights. Sudermann's characters talk too much, and they are abnormal. Magda is abnormal. Her admirers endeavor to show that she is a lovely upholder of the maternal instinct. The filial instinct, to my mind, is far more creditable, and Magda has none of that. She treats her poor old father very badly, and deliberately utters advanced ideas to shock his pitifully provincial and bigoted mind. The woman who grows too big for her home should either keep out of it or behave herself decently when she gets there. She should not give her silk chemises into the family wash, because a little deliberation will show her that her Puritanical relations will consider them fast and immoral. Nor should she smoke before her simple relatives. The tobacco habit is a hard one to break, but the commonest courtesan would have a little more respect for her father and mother than to sit with a cigarette case in hand, lolling in an easy-chair, in their presence. Magda is a most detestable creature, and all her maternal fury for her illegitimate child will not endear her to honest theatre-goers. Camille sacrificed her cocotteries for the sake of the beloved Armand, but this Sudermann woman cannot even be induced to hold her tongue in the presence of the man who was responsible for her being. Her unconventionality is a disease with her.

Even Sudermann's biographers sniff at "Magda." I was reading "The Wish," a novel by Sunderman, the other day and an enthusiastic young woman, Miss Elizabeth Lee, who wrote an introductory biographical sketch, could find nothing better to say about "Heimath" than this: "As there is nothing in the world more beautiful and holy than the tie that binds parent and child, so is the contemplation of conflict between them always unlovely. We grant that in the storm and stress of modern life, such conflict is at times unavoidable, but it is scarcely the stuff of which works of art should be formed."

"Magda" is, of course, interesting, and it is a great tribute to Duse's genius that she made the character as nearly acceptable as it could ever be. This clever woman knew the weak point of the play, and she emphasized her filial tenderness with wonderful skill. In that second act she was a penitent, self-reproachful child, returning to the parental fold, and it was not her fault that she had to emerge from this condition. This second act, as I said last Tuesday, is in reality the difficult act of the play, although it contains none of the tours de force of tragic vehemence of succeeding scenes. Sarah failed in this act because she could not express the gentle, placid affection that Duse showed us. Her appearance in the "casa paterna" made all the other types present seem ludicrous and farcical. Duse blended herself with the meek colors of the Sudermann picture, and the scene was delightful.

Let this end "Magda" forever. We are weary of the play, and if any other actress intends trotting it out I hope that she will notify me in time for a respectable suicide. The play has been done to death in New York. There have been five Magdas so far, singeing their wings at the Sudermann flame. It is exasperating. Duse has done more than any other actress could do with the part. There is, in fact, nothing more to be done. It is all very well to say that Duse isn't Magda, that Sarah isn't Magda, that Modjeska isn't Magda. Nobody could possibly be Madga, and nobody need be at all anxious to be such a pitiful picture of a woman.

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I was amused at Duse's "collier de la reine"—her paste "collier de la reine," but I admired her pluck with which she glided on the stage in her sham gems. It was a daring thing to do, in this diamond-glowing New York community. No other actress would have had the adorable audacity to snap her fingers at these ineffably vulgar symbols of affluence. May we hope that Duse will set a fashion that will give rise to the decay and degeneration of the diamond mania. Think what this would mean to us? The mere idea is life-giving. No more diamond robberies, no more diamond losses, no more scenes written around diamond tiaras, no more diamond dramas, no more jewelry shop comedies. That means Utopia. Hail to it!

The actress who sticks diamonds over her chest doesn't do it because the stones are artistically beautiful. As a matter of fact, they are not artistically beautiful. As Sarah says, they interfere with the natural lustre of the eyes. The actress adopts them because they cost money; because they point ostentatiously to box-office success (or seem to do so), and because Mary Anne and Sarah Jane adore them. The fact that they can be hired for so much per week, and are hired at so much per week, does not disturb the ordinary actress's serenity in the least. There is always the chance that she will not be credited with having hired her gems, and that chance is worth taking.

Duse's paste necklace should not be dismissed contemptuously from mention as unworthy of consideration in the more potent light of her dramatic genius. I submit that the paste necklace is epoch-making. The fact that nobody found fault with it is a delicious proof that genius had nothing to do with vulgar exhibition. I would like to see pictures of that paste necklace hung flaringly in the dressing room of every star, inscribed with the legend "Let that be your aim. Act up to that, and when you can afford to wear it, know that you have become great."

Only a genius would dare to wear false diamonds in New York City, and Duse is a genius. She relinquishes veritable gems in favor of Tottie Coughdrop and Lillian Russell, and it is a subtly significant act on her part.

When Duse was in Washington a short time ago, two "suspicious looking" men were seen hanging around her dressing room. They were Americans, of course, reared in the belief that no well-regulated star could possibly star without $1,000,000 worth of diamonds concealed about her identity. A sensational story was spread to the effect that these men had made an attempt to steal Duse's diamonds. The actress heard of it, and laughed. She summoned her manager and read him a lecture. "There will be absolutely no diamond episodes in my American tour," she said, smilingly, "and I may as well tell you, for your future guidance, that I did not bring a single diamond to this country with me. Every gem you see is consistently false. Will you remember that?"

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Clyde Fitch, who produces a play called "Bohemia" at the Empire Theatre to-morrow night, has, in conjunction with his whilom accomplice, Leo Dietrichstein, called forth a furious tirade from Clement Scott, all on account of poor little "Gossip," the play he wrote for Mrs. Langtry. As that play was received with cold disdain in this city, and as the disdain was attributed to the alleged senseless objection to American playwrights, I feel called upon to mention Mr. Scott's indorsement of New York's verdict. The tastes of New York and London, as I have said before, are marvellously similar. "Such men and women as Mr. Clyde Fitch and Mr. Leo Dietrichstein present to our notice," says Mr. Scott, "never existed in any portion of the wide world." We can answer for the English section; Mr. Clyde Fitch must be responsible for the outrageous American caricatures, and German types are presumably safe in the hands of Mr. Fitch's partner, with the most unpronounceable name. Readers of halfpenny novelettes, profusely illustrated, are familiar with every character in this very cheap play. They know the Count Marcy in an elegant hand-me-down suit, who secretly adores the wife of his intimate friend. We can see the Count in the hands of the novelette illustrator, embracing his lost bride in the conservatory, weeping on her fair neck tears of agonizing remorse, and handling pistols that he is afraid to fire. * * * Concerning Mrs. Barry there is scarcely a dissentient opinion in the servants' hall.

"She is so like a lady—with a difference. She wears such lovely frocks, and sports such wondrous diamonds, and talks slang with such tone, and deals with the comedy of life in such an amateurish fashion, and is, so far as refinement and grace, and style, so purely imitative, that, in the words of the comic song, yet to be written, and sung at the music halls, 'she ought to be a lady, but she isn't.'"

Why Mr. Fitch ever consented to permit the presentation of this diamond tiara play in London, is a problem that I shall not attempt to solve. The judgment of New York, as I am always saying, is very reliable. A failure in New York is generally a failure in London, and vice-versa.

All American playwrights will be glad to hear that little Mrs. Madeleine Lucette Ryley's farce, "Christopher, Jr.," has, under the title of "Jedbury, Jr.," made a big hit in England. Three American successes—"Trilby," "The Prisoner of Zenda" and "Jedbury, Jr.," are now current in London.

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We shall have another Juliet Monday night presented to us by little Miss Julia Marlowe, who made her "debut" just before Mrs. Potter. It seems strange that the two actresses, who began at the same time, have with unrehearsed unanimity brought their Juliet to New York in the same month of the same year. It is a long time since we have seen Julia Marlowe. She has devoted herself for years to the "desolation of the road," fearing, presumably, to lose her all in the supposedly hypercritical metropolis. There are a good many actresses who pin their entire faith to "the road," and for that faith, in a good many cases, we should be deeply grateful.

Miss Marlowe, however, should cultivate our hothouse atmosphere. It is the only atmosphere in which she will be able to spread her dainty tendrils. I was fortunate enough to see her first performance of Parthenia in "Ingomar," and a very lovely performance it was, if I remember rightly, through the haze of eight or nine years. Then she tried a season at the Fifth Avenue, and gave us more "Ingomar," with "As You Like It" and "The Hunchback" thrown in. It was not a successful season and little Miss Marlowe was discouraged.

Now she comes to us as Mrs. Taber and Juliet with Mr. Taber as Romeo, and we shall be able to compare her work with that of Mrs. Potter across the street. Unless Miss Marlowe has succumbed to the evil influence of "the road," her Juliet should be an extremely dainty affair. She is young, though married, and she has been well trained, although in no conservatoire, as Sarah complained.

It never rains but it pours. We have been years without a Juliet, and lo! two of them drop in our midst simultaneously, and while Mrs. Potter is balcony-ing at Daly's, Miss Marlowe will be "leaning on her hand" at Palmer's.

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German opera rageth at the Academy of Music, sandwiched in between Sir Gus Arris's melodrama, "The Sporting Duchess," and Sutton Vane's equally lurid effusion "Humanity." Wagner, in other words, is surrounded by woful heroines, rescuing heroes and villainous villains. What matters this to Walter Damrosch, in his supremely purposeful interpretations? Nothing—nothing. German opera is stolid enough to leap triumphantly over any such trivial obstacles. Woe to the melodrama that hopes to get the better of Wagner and his disciples.

The Academy is a good old opera home. It reminds you of the days when you were young, tiddle-de-dum. Old men buttonhole you in the lobby and tell you all about the former vocal glories of this theatre. They mean well, but they are alarming nuisances. Nothing is so irritating as the reminiscence fiend. When I'm a hundred I don't believe that I shall feel the slightest inclination to recall anything that happened before I was ninety-nine. If I do, I shall check the impulse.

Mr. Damrosch made no mistake in selecting the Academy, although it happens to be in Fourteenth street, a fact that our Forty-second street managers appear to look upon as something bewilderingly criminal. The Academy is not ornate, but acoustically it is in capital condition, and as I sat in the first balcony and listened to "Lohengrin" last Wednesday night I marvelled at the perfect "sound properties" of the good old playhouse.

Very serious ,indeed, was the interpretation of "Lohengrin." Inside the theatre you felt that you were committing a sin to wink, while smiling would have been a most dangerous proceeding. I ventured to ask my neighbor—a gentleman with very long hair and a Wagnerian cast of countenance—if he would kindly lend me his programme for a moment, and I felt sorry immediately afterward that I had been so indiscreet. He looked daggers at me and uttered a German exclamation that was deadly. Even the Italian opera disciples had to admit that "Lohengrin" was extremely well sung and that both Milka Ternina and Katharina Lohse-Klafsky distinguished themselves very signally.

Criticising German opera in New York, however, is like waving a red flag in front of an irate bull. I will simply add that Mr. Damrosch may feel flattered at the reception accorded to him so far. His "conductor's dance" in front of the orchestra is, moreover, a matchless performance. I commend it to the attention of Walter Jones.

ALAN DALE.